

DISCIPLESHIP GOALS

John 15:1-8

Today, I want to talk to you about your goals in life. Not just friend goals, personal goals, or relationship goals, but the goals of a Christian Disciple. When I use the word “disciple,” I’m talking about anyone who has or will put their trust in Jesus. What’s tragic is that this word disciple often gets lost in Christian culture; we refer to ourselves as believers or Christians, which is fine, but the standard for anyone that follows Christ is to be a disciple.

The word disciple in the bible means “pupil” or “student.” In other words, someone who is intentionally learning from a teacher/master with the purpose of being like them. We see the ultimate example of this when we look at the disciples of Jesus. They spent years learning from Jesus, and when it was time for Jesus to leave them, He commanded them to go into the world and make disciples. In *Matthew 28:19-20a* Jesus said - *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you ...*

Jesus called His followers to go and make disciples, but what we always miss is that Jesus said this to disciples ... meaning that in order to make a disciple, you yourself have to be a disciple! It’s not about packing out churches or having thousands of followers on Instagram, it’s about who you’re pouring into the way Jesus poured into His disciples. The question is, who are we discipling?

I believe this message is important because the world has enough influencers but not enough disciple-makers. Eleven disciples changed the world in one lifetime; what would happen if we took the time to pour into someone, so that they could be strengthened in their walk and encouraged to do the same?

Again, before we can make a disciple, we first have to be one, so today I want to talk about some discipleship goals that will help us become disciples who make disciples, by looking at three points.

- Attached to the Vine
- Abiding in the Vine
- Developed by the Vine

Before we go any further let’s get some context on the author of this gospel and John 15:1-8

Context: The author of this Gospel is the Apostle John, who was the brother of James and a son of Zebedee. He was a fisherman until Jesus called him to follow Him. John was also known as the disciple that Jesus loved.

As we will see in John 15:1-8, John writes about a conversation Jesus had with His disciples in the days before He was crucified. Before He was no longer with them, Jesus reminded His disciples of where their focus needs to be after He’s gone.

Attached to the vine V1-3 (READ)

I AM THE TRUE VINE

What Jesus says here is a big deal! In Exodus 3:14 at the burning bush God speaks to Moses and introduces Himself as *“I AM WHO I AM”* – and when God told Moses to go free the enslaved people of Israel, Moses hesitated and asked, “How will they believe that you sent me?” God told Moses to tell the Jews that *“I AM has sent me to you.”* By using this I AM statement, Jesus is declaring His deity. Meaning that the same God who sent Moses to free the nation of Israel, is the one who is standing before them now.

- The divinity of Jesus is essential, because no one but God can claim to be an absolute. Jesus didn’t say, “I am one of many vines,” He said, “I am the TRUE VINE.” This was significant because, in the Jewish culture, the vine represented the ultimate source of life. *Acts 17:28 ... for in Him we live and move and have our being.*

- For the disciple, this is something to be encouraged by, because it means that we don't have to join the world's "frantic search" for what satisfies. Jesus makes it clear that, for the disciple, He is their source of life, and anything else will only come up short.

AND MY FATHER IS THE VINEDRESSER

The example of the vine and the vinedresser is an Old Testament symbol of God's relationship with Israel. Israel was often referred to as the vineyard that God cared for as a vinedresser. *Psalm 80:8-9 You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land.* The vinedresser in ancient times and today would pay careful attention to his vineyard, making sure it had everything it needed to grow, and would sometimes prune or cut away anything that hindered the production of fruit in the vineyard. In the same way, God took time to plant, nurture, and prune Israel for growth.

- The big difference is that when Jesus makes this statement, He isn't just talking about Israel, but anyone who puts their faith in Him. Jesus is saying, "I know Israel had a reputation of being the vine, but no longer; I am the vine you need to be connected to."
 - For those that put their faith in Jesus, they gain the intentional care of God as the vinedresser. His goal is to cultivate our lives, so we produce fruit as we're attached to Jesus the vine.

EVERY BRANCH THAT DOES NOT BEAR FRUIT HE TAKES AWAY - It's important to know that Jesus is using an analogy to communicate a theological truth here. As a result, we have to be careful of looking too deep into an analogy. What we know from the text, is that Jesus isn't speaking of the unbelieving world or Israel, but Christians. Christians are the branches, but you might be thinking, "How then does God take away the branches if they are Christians?" For clarification, Jesus isn't talking about a Christian losing their salvation, but people who have the "appearance" of being saved, but never attached themselves to the vine. Meaning that Jesus was never Lord of their life.

- We don't have to guess "who's really saved" and "who isn't," because Christ's analogy makes it obvious. He said, "If the branch is attached to the vine, then it will bear fruit, and if not, it won't bear fruit." If someone is truly attached to Christ, the vine, then they WILL bear fruit; it's not something to guess at, it's obvious. This also works the other way, in that it's painfully obvious when a person claims to follow Christ but lacks the fruit of a life connected to Him.
 - Again, this is speaking of people who look like Christians, but Christ is not Lord of their lives, and as a result they don't bear fruit, making it obvious that they don't know Jesus.

What does this fruit look like? Bearing fruit means that your life has been changed by Jesus. That you've been filled with His Spirit and are becoming more Christlike. An example of this fruit is found in *Galatians 5:22-23 The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* It is important to realize that becoming more like Christ starts by receiving Him as Lord and Savior. Then growing in knowledge of Him by getting in the word and applying it to your life.

- Sometimes, when we see this list, we can begin to think, "Ok, I know I need more patience, so I am going to focus on being more patient," but that's the incorrect mindset when it comes to bearing fruit. We must think, "How can I become more like Christ?" It's living in this mindset that will not only position us to become more patient, but we will bear fruit to everything else as well.
 - What I find comforting about this, is that if you feel like there's a lack of fruit in your life, then you have hope, because someone who isn't connected to Christ, wouldn't care about that. So, then the question becomes, "How do I produce more fruit?" *Hosea 10:12* gives us the answer - *Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the Lord ...*
 - The solution when we feel like we lack Christlike fruit is to RUN TO HIM, PURSUE Him! Even if we don't feel like it! This is what breaks up the hard ground of our hearts so that new fruit can be produced.

AND EVERY BRANCH THAT BEARS FRUIT HE PRUNES - This process of bearing fruit is a lifelong experience. God will continue cultivating our lives to produce fruit until we meet Him face to face. In the meantime, He acts as the vinedresser, and will prune or cut away anything that would hinder the production of fruit in our lives.

When we look at verse 3, this process of pruning had already begun in the disciples; that's why Jesus said, "YOU ARE ALREADY CLEAN BECAUSE OF THE WORD I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU." The disciples had been with Jesus for years and applied His teachings to their lives. It doesn't mean that they were perfect, but through the word Jesus spoke to them they had been pruned. For example, by applying what Jesus told them about the real purpose of the Messiah, they were pruned from an incorrect understanding of what the Messiah had come to do.

- Being pruned by God doesn't mean that we walk around in fear of God's metaphorical pruning scissors, but God uses His word to cleanse and prune things out of our lives that would hinder our growth. *Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*
 - If you want to bear fruit and become more like Christ, you have to be in God's word. It's there that God will reveal things to you that are hindering your growth and what you can do about it.
 - I must note that He doesn't reveal these things to hinder YOU, but to unleash your full potential so you can live the life He has called you to.

The goal of a disciple is to be attached to Jesus, the true vine, as their source of life and produce Christlike fruit.
When the disciple meets this goal, the next goal is to....

Abide in the vine V4-6

ABIDE IN ME AND I IN YOU

Abide means to remain or stay around. Abiding in Him doesn't mean that we trust in our own strength to abide, because sometimes we can be unfaithful, or stray away; but abiding is more about being dependent on Him to keep us. *1 Peter 1:5* says that we are ... *kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*. This means that our ability to abide is based on His power not ours! This isn't to say that we can be passive in the process of abiding! It involves making choices that keep us dependent and connected to Him.

- For example: *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*. Rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks are practical ways that cause us to stay dependent on Him and allow Him to continue His work in us.

But what about those that don't abide? Those that don't abide, but leave the faith give conclusive proof that they were never really a true believer in the first place. *1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us*. The beautiful thing about this is that if someone returns to Christ, they are again welcomed into God's family, because it's evidence that God has been working in their lives, and their earlier conversion was real.

Jesus goes on to make it very clear why abiding is important by saying, "**AS THE BRANCH CANNOT BEAR FRUIT OF ITSELF UNLESS IT ABIDES IN THE VINE NEITHER CAN YOU UNLESS YOU ABIDE IN ME.**" Going back to Jesus' analogy, He makes an obvious point that the only way a branch can produce fruit is by abiding in the vine. He's basically saying that the fruit God requires can't be imitated or grown from a different source; it can only come from a life that abides in Jesus, the true vine.

- When we read this, it's easy to wonder why Jesus would make such an obvious point, but the honest truth is that sometimes, in the church, there are people who would rather fake fruits of Christlikeness than grow them by abiding in Christ.

- The concept of “fake it till you make it” doesn’t apply to Christlikeness, but it’s a process, over time, of abiding in Him.

Jesus continues to say - **I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRANCHES. HE WHO ABIDES IN ME, AND I IN HIM, BEARS MUCH FRUIT; FOR WITHOUT ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING.** The point that’s being made is, if we don’t abide, we can’t do anything. We can’t love like Christ, do great works, or accomplish anything of spiritual value for ourselves, or others.

What’s crazy, is that God created human beings with a nature to bear fruit. So, if we aren’t abiding in Christ and producing fruits of Christlikeness, then we are abiding in the flesh, and producing fruits of the flesh. Galatians 5:19-21a Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like. Bottom line: Fruit reflects the source.

- The fruit we produce in our lives will also impact the people around us. To use another analogy – The branch doesn’t eat the fruit it produces, but others do. In other words, the fruit you produce in life, whether Christlike or fleshly, will be taken in by those around you. *Proverbs 10:21 The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of wisdom.* This is why it’s so important that we make sure that, as disciples, we abide in the true vine, because the fruit we produce impacts the people around us. For example: the fruit we produce can either make Christ real to others or confirm that following Him doesn’t make any difference.

For those that do not abide, Jesus says - **IF ANYONE DOES NOT ABIDE IN ME, HE IS CAST OUT AS A BRANCH AND IS WITHERED; AND THEY GATHER THEM AND THROW THEM INTO THE FIRE, AND THEY ARE BURNED** – Again, the analogy Jesus presents here is not about losing your salvation; but His message is about those who “put on” the appearance of faith in Christ, but are disconnected from the true vine. The point in this analogy is that there is no such thing as a disciple that doesn’t abide. If they are a disciple, then they abide; if they don’t abide it’s proof that they aren’t a disciple and don’t know Jesus.

The goal of the disciple is to continue abiding in Christ, so they produce authentic Christlike fruit in their lives.
When the disciple meets this goal, the next goal is to be....

Developed by the vine V7-8

ABIDE IN ME AND MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU – This is essential for the development of the disciple. It’s not just abiding in Christ, but that His word abides in us as well. The reason this is important is because in this life you will encounter stress, anxiety, and trouble, but how will you stand strong in the midst of it? When we look in God’s word the answer is clear. *Psalm 91:1 He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.* This supernatural security and peace is available to anyone who allows God’s word to abide in them.

- What does this look like practically? In order to have God’s word abide in you, it can’t be something you pick up once in a while, or something you only reach for when you’re in trouble, but it must become a lifestyle. This is what gives us access to the peace and protection God gives when trouble comes. Abiding in His word means a lifestyle immersed in his word.

YOU WILL ASK WHAT YOU DESIRE AND IT SHALL BE DONE FOR YOU – As we abide in God’s word, something amazing happens. Our desires become His desires, and as a result when we pray, we pray for things that line up with what God wants, and He answers.

In fact answered prayer should be something that believers should expect, not because they are perfect, but because they are abiding in Christ and His word.

- But what if you feel like God hasn't answered your prayer yet? I'm not going to act like I can answer why God does what He does, but what I can tell you is that He's good. If we remember that He is good, whether He answers our prayer request today or at a later time we can trust Him with the outcome.

BY THIS MY FATHER IS GLORIFIED, THAT YOU BEAR MUCH FRUIT; SO YOU WILL BE MY DISCIPLES.

Many times, when we think about bringing glory to God, we get things twisted. We think that God is only glorified when we're on our best behavior. But Jesus makes it clear that in order to bring glory to God we must bear fruit.

- The purpose behind this analogy is to cause the people of God to be motivated to produce as much fruit as possible in their lives, because not only does it bring glory to God, but it's the foundation for anything He's called us to do.

Conclusion:

If we are going to live up to the standard of Christ, we can't just be church attendees, or just a fan of Jesus. We must be His disciples, intentionally seeking to learn from Him and be like Him, so that we can do what God has called us to do. Discipling could mean pouring into someone in your household or others that you're close with.

The bottom line is that the world isn't going to change because we pack out a building every week; it's going to change because we're following Christ's example by making disciples. Before that happens, we must first be a disciple.

This begins as we enter into a relationship with Jesus.